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Inside Story
Fantastic New Interiors

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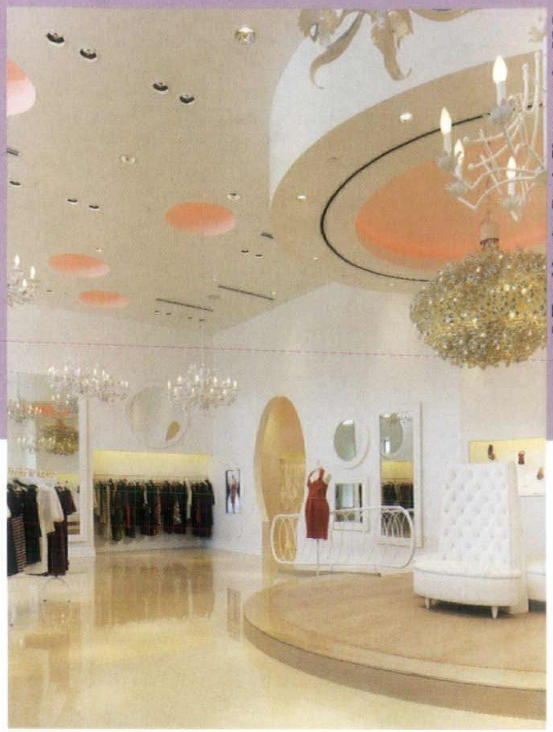

Interior of Nanette Lepore boutique in Chevy Chase.

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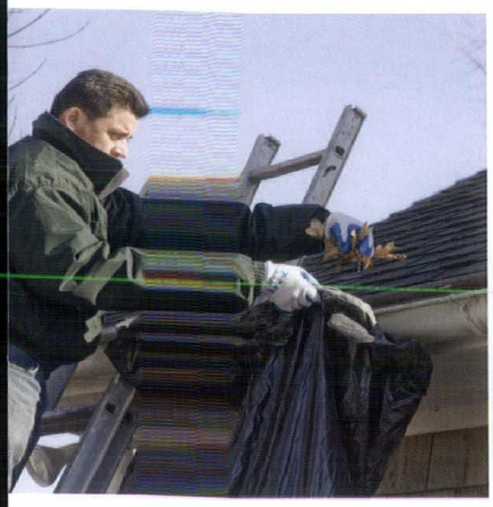
ON THE COVER: Lounge area at Town Danceboutique, by STUDIOS Architecture. Photograph by © Nikolas Koenig, Chris Boals Artists, Inc. Cover Design by Ronald O'Rourke

How does a client maintain the beauty and life of your residential project *after it's built*?



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DC INTERIORS: GOING GLAM

David Hamilton

When our editor, G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA, and I met to review the projects for this issue, he used one word to describe them: glamour. Until recently, that might have been an unlikely word to use in discussing DC-area architecture, which traditionally has been known for stuffy institutional buildings and K Street boxes. Not anymore: This issue brings you a lot of architectural glamour, showing that the DC architectural scene continues to diversify and become a lot more interesting.

We've got feature articles covering cool U Street nightclubs, beautifully designed retail stores downtown and in Bethesda, and smart new restaurants in Penn Quarter. One of those restaurants, Proof, will host our **Dinner with the Architect** event during our annual **Architecture Week.** Dinner with the Architect, like all of our Architecture Week events, is open to the public, and you are most definitely invited to sign up! And speaking of places to eat, our **GreenDC** feature goes tangy—as in Tangysweet, an innovatively designed yogurt shop in Dupont Circle.

Welcome!

We also have articles showing architectural glamour in an unlikely-sounding setting: the office building. "Making Work a Pleasure" covers some beautiful interiors by Envision Design, Lehman Smith McLeish (LSM), and Gensler that may alter your image of the typical Washington office. Another article covers the renovation of an outdated entry lobby in a Crystal City office building. With a few smart moves, LSM brought that lobby into the 21st century and improved its connection to the building's garage-level entrance area. It's a great example of how an architect can take an outdated, drab area and make a few relatively inexpensive changes that have a big payoff.

For the last two years, we've rotated between two editors for the magazine—Denise Liebowitz and Martin. Denise has decided to step down from the editor's post so she can take some time to travel and live the retired high life. I want to thank Denise for her tremendous work in helping the magazine grow into the engaging and award-winning publication that it has become. I'm deeply grateful to her for the insight, energy, and great stories she brought to the magazine. I'm hoping to lure her back to write the occasional story, though I know it'll be hard to compete with overseas adventures. With Denise stepping down, Martin has graciously agreed to helm the magazine henceforth. I'm looking forward to working with him to continue the magazine's growth and development.

I'd be remiss if I didn't remind you again that our annual Architecture Week series of events for the public is rapidly approaching. Architecture Week this year takes place September 13 through 19, and we've got a jam-packed schedule of events for you, including tours, lectures, the Dinner with an Architect, a celebration of 10 years of **CANstruction,** a **Baseball with the Architect** event at the new ballpark, and the awards event for our annual design competition. Come to Architecture Week—and share the glamour!

Mary Fitch, AICP, Hon. AIA
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Contributors

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G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA ("Brick Lair," "Designed for Dancing," "Tangysweet," and "Architecture Ahead") is senior vice president and curator at the **National Building Museum.** He is the editor of *ARCHITECTURE**DC***.

Ronald O'Rourke ("A New First Impression" and "Designs to Savor") is a regular contributor to *ARCHITECTURE**DC***.

Janet B. Rankin ("Retail Details") is a director with **Lehman Smith McLeish.** This issue includes her first contribution to *ARCHITECTURE**DC***.

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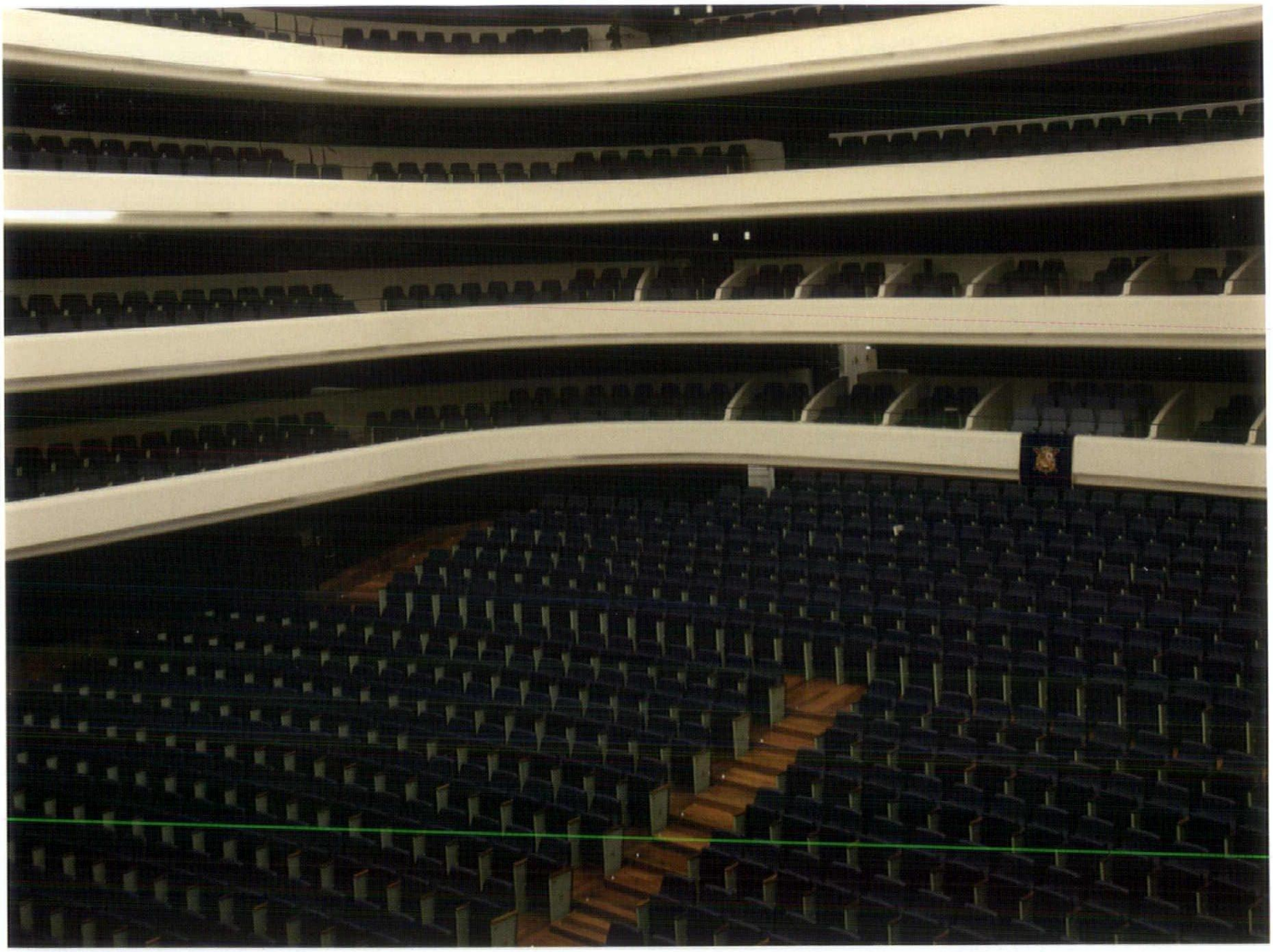

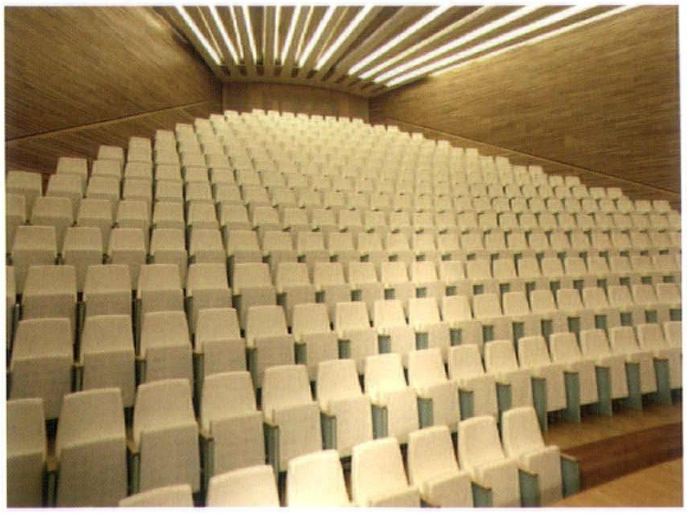

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Hello Cupcake • Project4 Gallery • Transmaterial.net

by Mary Fitch, AICP, Hon. AIA

You had me at…: **Hello Cupcake,** a new shop just south of Dupont Circle, is set to open by the time you're reading these pages. Offering a sophisticated twist on an old-fashioned classic, owner Penny Karas makes cupcakes that are out of this world. We know this because she made cupcakes for AIA | DC's garden party at the Swiss Ambassador's Residence last May. Her delicious lemon creations for that event were decorated with tiny fondant Swiss flags. These "bespoke" cupcakes, like all of Karas' products, were made entirely from natural ingredients. Penny's new store is designed by her husband, Bill Bonstra, AIA, of the DC firm **Bonstra | Haresign Architects.** Bonstra used a rich palette of sustainable materials to design an interior that transcends the typical retail bakery. Visit Hello Cupcake at **1351 Connecticut Avenue, NW,** or online at **www.hellocupcakeonline.com.**

Shavanna Miller, Travel and Leisure Fall 2006

Art for Architecture's sake: **Project 4** is a new entry into the Washington art scene. Designed by the DC architectural firm **Inscape Studio,** this two-level gallery showcases a variety of media, including installation, video, sculpture, and site-specific works. The gallery also operates an art consulting service, called Art + Space, which emphasizes trends in contemporary art and design. So whether you're looking for a single piece for a favored location or enough to fill an entire office building, visit Project 4 at **903 U Street, NW,** or online at **www.project4gallery.com.**

Materially Green: We just finished our annual DesignDC conference, which was devoted this year to green design, and have been pondering the question, "What's the next green innovation?" Architect Blaine Brownwell has an answer to that—many answers, in fact: He locates innovative new green building materials and products, and shows them on his website, called **Transmaterial.** Products featured on Brownwell's site at the time of this writing included *Permapave* driveway pavers that allow water to pass through, helping to reduce stormwater runoff; *GreenPix,* a solar power-harnessing, light-emitting facade system; and *xGnP,* exfoliated graphite nanoplatelets that can change the fundamental properties of plastics, enabling them to perform more like metals. There's a lot of innovation out there—find out more about it at **www.transmaterial.net.** You can also sign up for a free email newsletter that will bring it all directly to your inbox.

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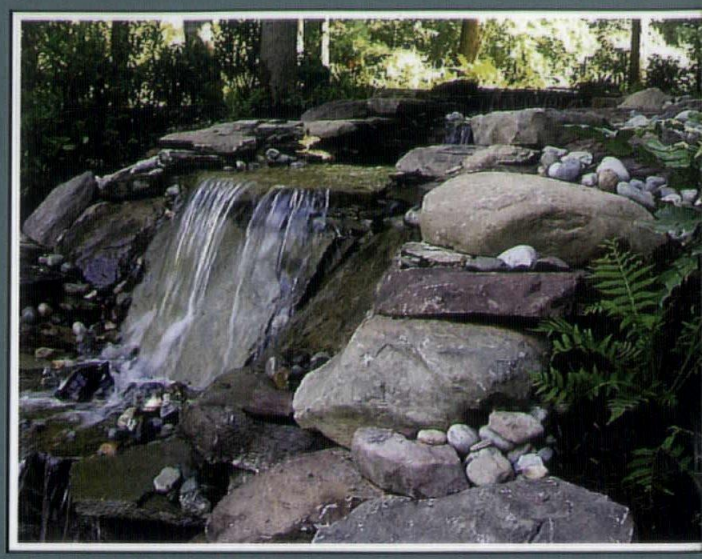

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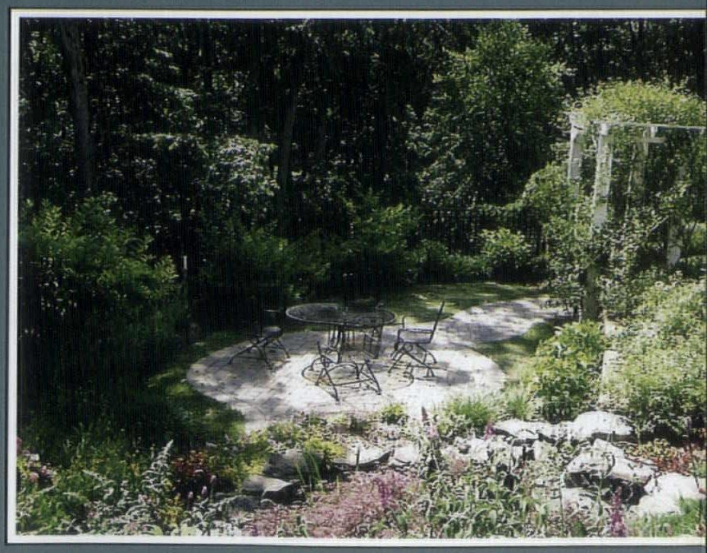

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Lobby of the Recording Industry Association of America.

Making Work a Pleasure:

Three Washington-area Office Interiors Bring Panache to the Workplace

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA

Washington is stereotyped as a culturally conservative place, but while the city is not known for radical architectural experimentation, it is nonetheless full of high-quality, often quite progressive design. This particularly applies to commercial interiors. After all, when was the last time readers of *ARCHITECTURE**DC*** saw a dark, clubby, woody office in Washington—other than a restoration—in this publication or any other? Tradition may hold sway for residential interiors—although even that's changing—but an elegant brand of modernism has dominated the Washington commercial scene for at least a decade. This is even true of federal government offices, long regarded as aesthetic hold-outs.

But if bright, clean, and functional—i.e., modern—design is now the norm of the Washington establishment, then what defines the vanguard? A tour of some exceptional commercial interiors suggests that it entails a tight relationship between the character of the client/user and the design solution. It draws unprecedented inspiration from the humanistic aspects of a client's mission and operations. It resides in the cusp between aesthetics and function: aesthetics is regarded as a *function*, a crucial if subjective function that both reflects and advances a company's aspirations and culture.

RIAA conference room.

Main conference area as configured for a performance (top) and meeting (bottom).

The Recording Industry Association of America— An Entertaining Design Solution

A visit to the offices of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) starts in the building's lobby, which is a handsome, spacious, archetypally "Old Washington" room carved from part of the central collonade of the former Woodward and Lothrop department store, now converted to a mix of office and retail uses. The elevator cabs, clad in dark wood, have a similar classical character.

But when the elevator doors open onto the 10th-floor RIAA suite, by **Envision Design,** the atmosphere changes dramatically. The visitor is confronted with black-and-white supergraphics of singers in action, including a photomural of a tongue large enough for the taste buds to be clearly visible. Three flat-screen TV's play music videos. A grand piano on a round, orange carpet stands in front of a wall of glass, with views of a furnished roof terrace and other buildings' rooftops beyond. The scene immediately and powerfully conveys the glamour and excitement of music.

The mission of the RIAA is, in chairman and CEO Mitch Bainwol's words, "to connect people to the experience of listening to music." Toward that end, the association seeks to engage government officials and other decision-makers, and for that, a "wow!" factor is important, architecturally and otherwise. Visitors to the RIAA offices must sense the energy of the music industry, while being made to feel like VIPs themselves.

While still in its former offices, the RIAA had introduced live and simulcast performances by well-known recording artists as a means of providing a special perk for clients. Such performances posed a challenge, however, since there was no space expressly designed for that purpose. With these events in mind, Envision conceived of the new space so it could be easily transformed from lobbyists' offices and support functions to a cool-but-comfortable concert venue.

In the lobby, a portion of the reception desk—which has a wood finish and houses the computer and files—easily detaches and rolls away, leaving only a white bar. A wall of glass separating the conference room folds away, and white curtains cover the conference room walls. Conference furniture—all of which stacks and folds—is replaced by white chairs that come in from the

lunchroom, which in turn becomes the catering kitchen. Two adjacent smaller conference rooms become green rooms, where performers prepare to go on stage. A flick of a switch changes the lights from the office-style white fluorescents to LEDs, which wash the white walls, furniture, bar, and curtains with changing colors.

The easy but dramatic conversion is a *tour de force,* an illusion worthy of RIAA's show-biz base. But the remainder of the 24,000-square-foot space, where most of the daily work of the association happens, is equally engaging and clever. This is partly because the shell space—one of three penthouse levels added to the Woodies building in 2002—has eccentrically-spaced columns and an irregular perimeter. "There was no option but to do something unusual," says **Ken Wilson, AIA, IIDA, LEED® AP,** principal at Envision, adding that the unusual is his preference anyway. Budgetary constraints also dictated a certain modesty in the design. At the time of the association's move, the recording industry was in the throes of transition, forced upon them by the increasing ease with which people could copy digital recordings. RIAA faced the dilemma of expanded needs (i.e., to promote their members' much greater interest in protecting intellectual property) at a time of dramatically falling industry profits.

As a result, even though Envision is one of the pioneers of sustainable design in Washington, and the client held a strong interest in green design, the RIAA office is not a LEED-certified project. Actually, the design includes most of the "green" elements one associates with Envision's work, including highly efficient, controllable lighting, and non-toxic materials with recycled content and/or local sourcing where possible. Wilson believes that the space would earn sufficient LEED points for certification, but RIAA needed to spend money on the sustainable components, rather than formal recognition of the effort.

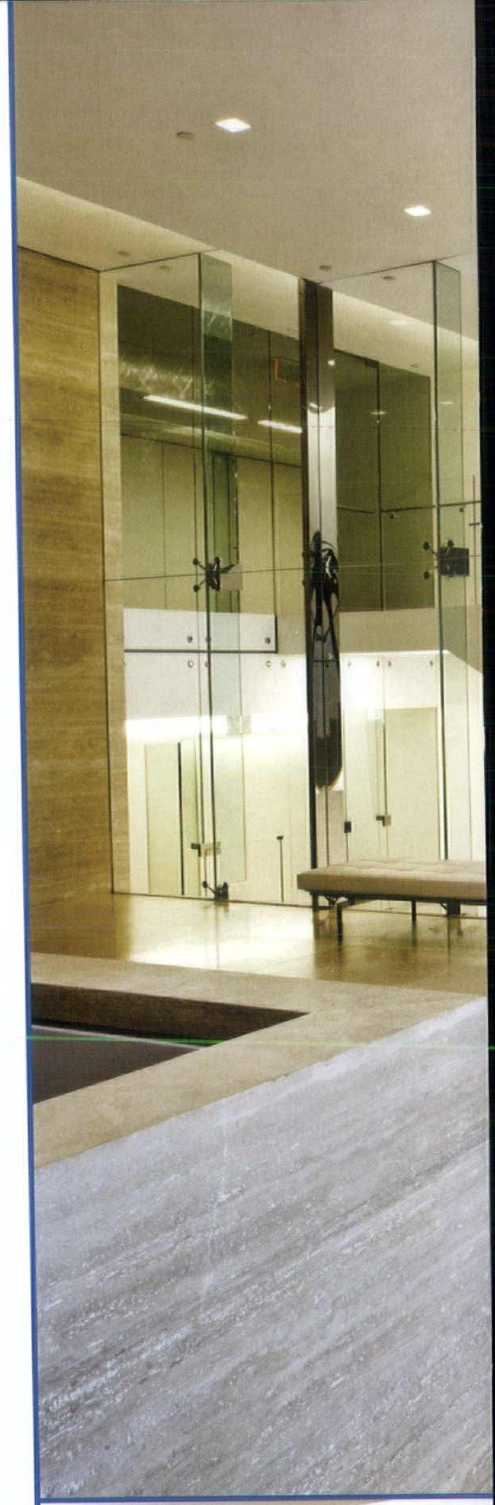
Given the RIAA's goals and constraints, a loft-style interior was the logical choice, providing the desired character within the required budget. Most floors are the existing concrete with a sealer applied. Ceilings are dropped in work areas, but no ceilings were added in most circulation areas, where ducts, wiring, piping, and structural elements are exposed.

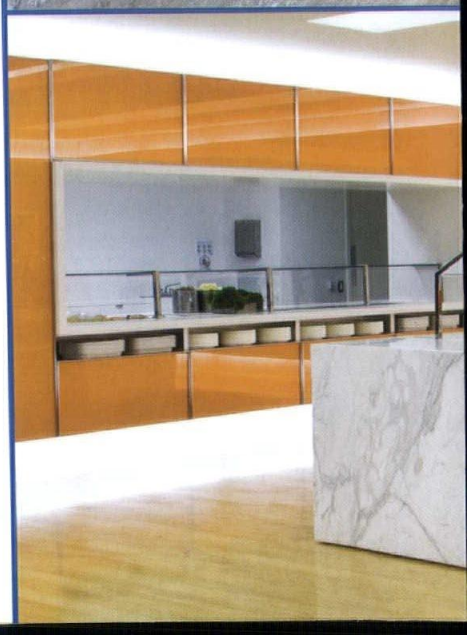
The corridor lighting serves as a neat illustration of the synergies that Envision achieved in the design. The light fixtures are plain fluorescent strips, which offered the mutual advantages of low cost and high efficiency, thereby responding to both budgetary constraints and sustainability goals. The clever move, however, was the decision to mount the fixtures at random angles, which creates a funky, playful aesthetic while simultaneously acknowledging a construction reality—with all the ducts and pipes running in the ceilings, it would have been challenging to provide regular spacing and orthogonal alignments.

The office area reflects a similar balance between budget, aesthetics, sustainability, and ease of construction. The irregular floor plan provided limited space for typical cubicle farms, for example. Envision responded by designing custom workstations that fit the space efficiently, cost less than standard office systems furniture, and were made of green materials. Between these islands of calm are special spaces and elements—such as a conference room lined in channel-glass and several spaces with curved, colored acrylic panels—which efficiently negotiate the odd columns and walls of the base building while providing funky accents. Framed gold and platinum records provide relevant decoration throughout the office, and each conference room is named for a recording star—Sinatra, Cash, Joplin, etc.—whose images were printed on canvas (rather than non-sustainable vinyl, take note) and mounted to acoustic wall panels.

"We had strong views on functionality," says CEO Bainwol, "But we understood that it's the design team's job to be creative." He credits Envision with a "flawless execution, within budget." Well, not quite flawless. Shortly after RIAA moved in, decals were added to the clear glass doors because people kept walking into them. One person actually had to go to the emergency room (the doors were not damaged). Wilson and Bainwol attribute the accident to wonderment at the space: the victims were so taken by the openness and views that they didn't notice the glazing. That's doubtless true, but in the spirit of branding, one might look at it another way: A few bloodied noses is a small price to pay to fulfill the rock-and-roll maxim that "it isn't a party if no one gets hurt."

The RIAA office was profiled briefly as winner of two Chapter Awards in last winter's issue of ARCHITECTURE**DC**.





DLA Piper lobby.

© Jim Tetro Photography

Café at DLA Piper.

© Jim Tetro Photography

Conference room with atrium at left.

© Jim Tetro Photography

DLA Piper—Facilitating Transparency and Communication

A bowl on the main reception desk of the downtown Washington office of the international law firm DLA Piper is filled with tiny chocolate bars. The candies are wrapped with custom labels of various colors bearing the DLA Piper logo. Aside from large, custom artwork, the chocolates are the only touches of color within the luminous, minimalist space. This environment is emblematic of **Lehman Smith McLeish's** design for the entire 230,000-square-foot office space: a touch of color and flavor that humanizes, softens, and lends a visceral pleasure to the otherwise serenely serious, professional, hardworking offices of the second largest law firm in the world.

The chocolates also bear the slogan *Everything Matters.* The chocolate provides no additional explanation of this slogan, nor does the company website, where *Everything Matters* is quietly positioned at the top of each page. A tour of the 10-level space, however, renders any explanation unnecessary. DLA Piper has more than 3,700 lawyers in 64 offices in 25 countries covering every facet of the legal business. A high level of performance is requisite, and this can only happen when staff and clients understand that *everything* matters, including, of course, the design of the firm's offices.

The project team from LSM clearly took the slogan to heart. Their work included a dedicated street lobby, all offices, restrooms, a conference center, libraries, and even a staff restaurant (not just lunch room) and roof deck: *every activity* matters. Although there's a rigid hierarchy of spaces—as one would expect in a powerful law firm—there are no spaces that can be regarded as "back-of-house" in architectural terms: *every space* matters. The mind-boggling array of technological elements required of the modern office—from sprinklers, air-conditioning, and fire alarm systems to the highest-tech internet and audio-visual devices—are perfectly coordinated with the interiors: *every tool* matters. Perhaps most important of all, before designing anything, LSM conducted a wide-ranging survey of the entire staff: *every person* matters.

A highly refined palette of quietly luxurious materials—limestone, white lacquer, fabric-wrapped panels, and etched and back-painted glass—is used throughout. But, as in the lobby, brightly colored architectural "treats" break up the professional norm: a colored glass panel marking each conference room, orange and red walls at each floor's coffee-copy-vending "hub," and most notably, the restaurant and adjacent roof terrace. These "treats" are not merely appealing inventions of the architects. They are the architects' reaction to the staff's top priority, as indicated in the survey: design that fosters interaction, communication, and a unified corporate culture.

DLA Piper, at the time that the project began, was the result of several recent mergers. Space had been added to the old offices with each merger—basically more floors in the same building—but staff members were cut off from one another and there was no cohesive firm culture. This perhaps explains why the concern for communication and unity actually outranked other top desires such as larger offices and better access to natural light and views.

The current building, a speculative office building designed by Hartman-Cox Architects with Boston Properties as the owner/developer, was picked by DLA Piper mostly because it offered a large block of space in a desirable location. DLA Piper got in early, during the design phase, and thus LSM was able to incorporate customizations to the base building.

"Boston Properties and Hartman-Cox were very positive about incorporating the changes we sought," says LSM's Janet Rankin. "It was a harmonious relationship." Major modifications included extending the atrium upward, creating a separate 8th Street lobby for DLA Piper, opening the west elevator lobby to the atrium at all the firm's floors, and removal of a structural column to provide clear space for the largest meeting/multipurpose room. (Rankin notes that the last of these changes seemed certain to cause the most heartburn—it required the addition of a huge structural truss—but that in fact it was the easiest of the base building changes to achieve.)

All these modifications have a direct relationship to the improved integration and communication the staff sought: the atrium and lobby provide a central focus and a singular street identity; the opening of the elevator lobby to the atrium animates the atrium by providing views of staff coming and going; and the large, unobstructed multipurpose room is invaluable to the law firm. The changes illustrate the LSM mantra: "We help our clients get the best out of their business. Every design decision is related to their business needs." Oh, and everyone needs a chocolate every so often.

Rand Construction—Built for a Builder

The Alexandria headquarters of Rand Construction Corporation, designed by the Washington office of **Gensler,** are not subtle when it comes to branding. The Rand logotype is emblazoned across the building entrance doors, on the elevator doors, and over the reception area's fireplace. The corporate graphics are, nonetheless, well integrated with the overall design and, in part because the logotype itself whispers rather than yells, they are relatively unobtrusive. In fact, the office as a whole is notable for its decidedly non-corporate atmosphere.

This is no accident. Rand chairman and CEO Linda Rabbitt views the company's space first and foremost in domestic terms. "Our employees spend a lot of time here," she says, reflecting on the intense nature of her business. "This really is their second home." The unmistakably residential character of the offices derives from such elements as the overtly homey reception furniture and the inviting bar/lunchroom, to which, much as at a house party, everyone naturally gravitates. The inevitable high-tech components of the modern office are deliberately downplayed in favor of what Rand president Jonathan Couch calls a more "earthy, comfortable" feel.

Couch also emphasizes another aspect of the space that is critical to the company's operations. Rand primarily builds commercial office interiors, and, as Couch puts it, "How can you speak intelligently about corporate offices if you don't work in something well-designed and -executed?" Examining their previous office situation—one that had grown in fits and starts over two decades and never had significant design attention in the first place—Rand executives concluded that there was a serious disconnect between the spaces they built for clients and the space in which they themselves worked. The new headquarters certainly put these concerns to rest.

The aspirations didn't stop there, though. Rand has begun to use its new space as a vehicle for teaching subcontractors about how design intent is realized. The firm now hosts numerous meetings using the space as a "showroom of our capabilities," according to Couch. And office design was only one facet—albeit the most expensive and complicated one—of an overhaul of almost every aspect of the company, from the logotype to internal operations.

How does a company achieve so many goals simultaneously? For Rand and Gensler, one key was the use of Integrated Project Delivery (IPD). IPD is a way of running a design and construction project in which all involved parties—owner, users, architect, contractor, and even subcontractors—are integrally involved in the process from the beginning to end, in contrast to the traditional design-bid-build process in which various parties enter and exit the process at different times.

For Rand's offices, IPD was taken to a new level. Not only were subcontractors involved from the beginning, but in some cases they actually worked in Gensler's offices, literally side by side with the design team. Branding and management consultants and a graphic design firm working with Rand were also brought into the office design process. Not only did numerous Rand employees have direct advisory roles, but they also actually constructed mock-ups of workstations and other elements—and then reconstructed them, and re-reconstructed them until everyone was happy.

Another critical factor in the success of the project was Gensler and Rand's decision to use Building

Main office area at Rand. (top)
Rand lobby. (bottom)